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20 OCT 1978

W.A. Barbee  
CW4, USA  
Chief, Declassification Branch  
Documents Division, Joint Secretariat  
The Joint Chiefs of Staff  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Sir:

Your letter of 19 June 1978 forwarded reproductions of eleven pages from the volume entitled The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954. The enclosures contained classified information attributable to the Central Intelligence Agency or its predecessor agencies, and you requested that we review the information to determine its current classification. We have conducted that review and have determined that the information no longer requires protection. On the basis of this letter, you are authorized to declassify those references attributable to the Central Intelligence Agency or its predecessor agencies which are contained in the enclosure referenced above.

We regret the delay in responding to your request and hope that it has not caused you too great an inconvenience.

Sincerely,



Chief,  
Classification Review Group  
Information Systems Analysis Staff  
Directorate of Administration

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Enclosure

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JCS review(s) completed.

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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

12 October 1978

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[Redacted]  
Room 5B828  
Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, D.C. 20505

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Dear [Redacted]

on 19 June 1978 a letter was sent to your office (copy attached) requesting declassification review of 11 pages extracted from a history entitled The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954 containing information extracted from CIA documents.

Request that this office be advised of the status of the subject request.

Sincerely,

*W A BarbEE*

W. A. BARBEE  
CW4, USA  
Chief, Declassification Branch  
Documents Division  
Joint Secretariat

Enclosure  
a/s

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19 June 1978

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[redacted]  
Room 5B2828  
Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, D.C. 20505

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Dear [redacted]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff is continuing to review for declassification the histories of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in order to give them wider distribution.

Enclosed are reproductions of pages from the volume entitled The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, History of the Indochina Incident, 1940-1954. These pages contain classified information extracted from, or attributed to, the Central Intelligence Agency.

Request your office review these pages to determine the current classification of the intelligence information contained therein, and advise this office of your action. Please return the reproductions with your reply.

Upon removal of the enclosures, this letter becomes UNCLASSIFIED.

Sincerely,

W. A. BARBEE  
CW4, USA  
Chief, Declassification Branch  
Documents Division  
Joint Secretariat

Enclosures

pp. 37, 47, 71, 72, 234,  
235, 237, 238, 271, 272,  
and 332.

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single subject of relief for the French who could. They also agreed that Admiral Leahy could confer with General Wedemeyer, who happened to be in Washington on a mission concerning China. General Wedemeyer did discuss the Indochina crisis with Admiral Leahy and also with the President himself. On 19 March General Wedemeyer sent the following message to General Chennault, announcing a new departure in American policy: "Admiral Leahy reports 14th Air Force loaded and ready to aid French resistance, but unable to move without permission from Washington. Informal statement of new attitude US Government is to help French provided such aid does not interfere with planned operations. The 14th Air Force may undertake operations against the Japanese in Indo-China to assist the French within the limitations imposed by the above policy."13

This deviation in the President's policy did not mean a return to his original view that all French possessions should be restored after the war. Nor did it herald the approach of vast American armies marching to liberate Indochina. The President instructed General Wedemeyer to give the French only such support as would be required in direct operations against the Japanese. And he urged the general to "watch carefully to prevent British and French political activities in that area"--as if the General could! As to military operations in support of French resistance forces, the only Americans entering Indochina under this policy were members of the OSS, whose mission was to gather intelligence and furnish arms to those fighting the Japanese.14

13. (TS) Memo, McFarland to Marshall, King, Arnold, "French liaison in Southeast Asia." 13 Mar 45; (S) Memo, Leahy to Marshall, King, Arnold, McFarland, 15 Mar 45; (S) Memo, Col McCarthy to Leahy, 16 Mar 45. All in same file. (S) Msg, Wedemeyer to Chennault, WABX 55400, MAPLE 52, 19 Mar 45, Msg file "MAPLE," 06104-2-8, vol III, TRB AGO.

14. (TS) Msg, Wedemeyer to Marshall, CFB 38160, CM-IN-27033, 28 May 45, CCS 385 Chinese Theater (12-29-44). (S) Memo, LTC Paul L.E. Helliwell (Ch ST OSS CT) to Strategic Services Officer, CT, "OSS Activities in French Indo-China," 10 Apr 45, "French Indochina. File No. 93-3, Operations and General Information." CIA Archives.

the British Chiefs, who amended the memorandum, however, to indicate that British aircraft also were able to fly in General Alessandri and his men.<sup>23</sup>

Special precautions were taken to avoid American involvement in either British or Chinese occupation policy. In the Chinese zone, American liaison teams were attached to Chinese forces, but their role was to assist in the supply and movement of Chinese troops. OSS personnel also were present in the Chinese zone. Indeed, some of them had been there since March 1945, when the United States decided to aid the French resistance forces. But during the occupation they were under strict orders to disassociate themselves from the French and to remain aloof from Sino-French-~~Annamese~~ relations, lest they place the United States "right in the middle." Their role during the occupation was limited to aiding prisoners of war and internees. Nor were these directives to be taken lightly. When General Wedemeyer heard that members of the OSS had interceded in Franco-~~Annamese~~ disputes, he ordered all uniformed OSS personnel withdrawn from the Chinese zone of occupation.<sup>24</sup>

Even before Japan surrendered, the United States had begun to consider how to avoid involvement in British

23. (U) JCS 1475, 17 Aug 45, CCS 387 Japan (2-7-45) sec 2. (C) CCS 903, Memo from Ch Fr Nav Miss in US, "French Participation in Surrender of Japanese Forces in Indochina," 16 Aug 45; (C) CCS 903/1, 19 Aug 45; (C) CCS 903/2, 6 Sep 45; (S) Memo, CCS Secys to Ch Fr Mil Miss in US, 7 Sep 45. All in CCS 370 (4-25-45). (C) CCS 644/35, 28 Aug 45; (C) CCS 644/36, 11 Sep 45; (S) Memo, Cornwall-Jones to McFarland, "Transportation of French Forces from China to Tonkin," 13 Sep 45. All in CCS 370 France (8-5-44) sec 6.

24. (S) Msg, Wedemeyer to CO, OSSST, CFBX, 24 Aug 45, (S) Msg, Davis to Heppner, NR 839, 1 Sep 45; (S) Msg, Indiv & Swift to Mims, NR 6849, 9 Sep 45. All in "FIC 93a-1," CIA Archives. (S) Msg, Wedemeyer to CO, OSS, CFB 11209, 10 Oct 45; (UNK) Ltr, Col W. R. Peers to CGUSFCT, "SSU Personnel in FIC," 2 Nov 45. Both in "FIC 93a-3," CIA Archives.

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In July the Viet Minh made several attempts to meet with Jean Sainteny, chief of the French mission in Kunming, but without success. The only French-Viet Minh contact worthy of note during this period came about through the good offices of the OSS. Using OSS channels the Viet Minh sent a message to the mission in Kunming listing certain reforms which it wanted instituted in the "political future of French Indochina." The Viet Minh asked that:

1) a parliament be elected by universal suffrage to govern the country and a French governor act as President until independence was assured.

2) independence be given to Indochina in a minimum of five years and a maximum of ten.

3) the natural resources of the country be returned to its inhabitants after fair compensation was made to the present holders; France continuing to benefit from economic concessions.

4) all the liberties described by the United Nations be assured to the Indochinese people.

5) the sale of opium be forbidden.<sup>32</sup>

The Viet Minh's request was carefully studied by Inspector of Colonies de Raymond, his deputy, Leon Pignon, General Alessandri, and M. Sainteny. In brief, the French representatives were bound by the already announced government policies which were incompatible with conditions set forth by the Viet Minh and the limitations of their authority. In their response, therefore, they were unable to offer the Viet Minh much hope that the French Government would look upon the five conditions with favor. Actually, an encouraging reply would probably have come as a surprise to the Viet Minh.

In the beginning of summer, 1945, OSS activity in Indochina increased sharply. By the middle of July several OSS teams, supplied by airdrops, were operating in Tonkin where they organized and directed guerrilla action against

32. Sainteny, Histoire d'une Paix Manquee, p. 57.  
(Translated by author.)

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the Japanese. These teams also provided military and political intelligence to OSS headquarters in Kunming. The July and August reports of the head of one of the teams are revealing. He had been in close contact with a Dr. Hoo and a Mr. Van (actually Ho Chi Minh and Giap) for a period of almost two months. Both Ho Chi Minh and Giap had strongly manifested their hostility to the French. At Ho's insistence the head of the team had been compelled to send a French officer attached to his group back to China. He also reported that Ho "would welcome a million Americans to come /to Indochina/ but not any French," for Ho considered the return of any French an "opening wedge." Yet the Viet Minh knew that the French would return eventually. When they did the Viet Minh would insist that complete independence be given to Indochina after a specified number of years. According to the report, the Viet Minh also realized that Indochina would need outside technical help. The Viet Minh would especially welcome United States aid.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, the Viet Minh was looking ahead, but as it planned and prepared for the future, it was overtaken by events.

When it came, the collapse of Japan was so quick that it scrambled the Viet Minh timetable. On 26 July Great Britain, the United States, and China called upon the Japanese Government to surrender unconditionally. And on 6 August the first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. Rightly the Viet Minh surmised the surrender of Japan was now a matter of days. The Viet Minh knew that its preparations still left much to be desired--in the north it wanted more time to train its troops and to organize a larger following among the broad mass of the population in the south the Viet Minh had no military formations worthy of the name and less than moderate public support. Nevertheless, the Viet Minh realized that the decisive moment to seize power had arrived. On 7 August Giap's guerrilla formations became the Viet Nam Army of Liberation, and at Viet Minh headquarters Military Order No. 1 was issued. It announced that "The hour has struck for a general offensive on all fronts." In rapid order the command was issued to march on Hanoi. A country-wide insurrection was launched, and a National Congress was hastily convened.<sup>34</sup>

33. (S) [REDACTED] Jul-Aug 45, FIC file 93a-3, SI Projects, CIA.

34. Devillers, Histoire du Viet-Nam, p. 135. (Translated by author.)

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concept of operations seems to have been to fortify strong points and wait for the enemy to attack them in the hope of inflicting many more casualties on the attackers than his own forces suffered. In this he had just enough success during 1952 to keep his strategy from being discredited. The result was that the Viet Minh forces usually held the initiative.

Unlike General de Lattre, General Salan did not wear, over his soldier's cap, the hat of High Commissioner. The duties of that office were given to M. Jean Letourneau, who as Minister Resident, nevertheless retained his position in the French Cabinet as Minister for the Associated States. Thus the French Government returned to the system that had worked so poorly in the years prior to 1951, that of dividing responsibility for French affairs in Indochina between a civil administrator and a military commander.<sup>1</sup> And since the Minister Resident was a more powerful figure than the High Commander, the stultifying hand of politics was once more in a position directly to restrain and blunt the sword of strategy. The extent to which political considerations affected the conduct of operations in Indochina cannot be determined, but it may be surmised that General Salan did not have a free hand.

Unfortunately for the new French Commander, he had to enter upon his duties under rather distressing circumstances. He had to contend with a general let-down in morale following the death of de Lattre, whom many in Indochina had regarded as the one man who could bring the war to a successful end. Also, he had to give up Hoa Binh, thereby acknowledging failure of the one strategically offensive operation undertaken by the French since the autumn of 1950. And in addition, he had to fight in the shadow of what the French were convinced was a constantly growing threat of Chinese Communist intervention. According to a United States intelligence estimate of

1. (S) Rpt, Gullion to State, "MDAP Monthly Report No. 19 (April 1952)," 23 May 52, G-3 091 Indo China sec I-A, bk I, DRB AGO.

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August 1952 "The French were apprehensive that substantial French victories would bring about such intervention, with which the French, because of their limited capabilities, would be unable to cope."<sup>2</sup>

Progress of the Fighting in Spring and Summer, 1952

The Viet Minh attacks against the French position at Hoa Binh had been accompanied by extensive infiltration of the Tonkin Delta area. In February, when the French evacuated Hoa Binh, this infiltration grew to serious proportions and occasioned the heaviest fighting since 1950. With considerable success the French employed mobile units against the Viet Minh forces within the delta perimeter and by July had restored the area to a relatively calm condition. In the process they reportedly crippled one Viet Minh division and inflicted severe losses on some other units, thus reducing the capabilities of the rebels, and also their morale, for several months.<sup>3</sup>

During the late summer the French undertook two limited operations south of the Delta against an isolated enemy regiment. These actions were successful in producing a considerable number of Viet Minh casualties but fell short of their aim, which was complete annihilation of the regiment. In the meantime Ho Chi Minh's main forces reportedly were being reorganized and put through a course of training, including combined maneuvers, in preparation for the fall campaign.<sup>4</sup>

The Autumn Campaign in 1952

When dry weather appeared, at the end of September, General Salan was in a position to attack, and probably

2. (S) CIA NIE-35/2, "Probable Developments in Indochina Through Mid-1953," 29 Aug 52, p. 3; (S) Rpt, Gullion to State, "MDAP Monthly Report No. 16 (January 1952)," 24 Mar 52, G-3 091 Indo China, sec I-A, bk I, DRB AGO.

3. (TS) Navarre Briefing Doc, Jun 53, in OMA files; (TS) Ann B to CINCPAC Staff Study, "Evaluation of Military Operations in Indochina," 18 Apr 53, CCS 092 Asia (6-25-48) BP pt 9.

4. Ibid.

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battle. But members of the CINCPAC staff who analyzed the campaign concluded that the battle had contributed little toward ending the war and that in order to achieve an unimportant victory the defensive-minded French Command had thrown away a chance to fight a decisive battle under favorable circumstances.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, except for the region around Na San, the Viet Minh remained in possession of the territory they had invaded. Although it was an area of secondary importance its capture was a psychological and political victory for the Communists and enhanced their prestige among the native population.

The autumn campaign in Tonkin convinced many American officials that unless some fairly drastic change was made in the French conduct of the war there would be a prolonged period of stalemate in Indochina during which the French-Vietnamese situation might well deteriorate. Two solutions to this problem were put forward. The first was to persuade the French to accept and carry out an aggressive plan of campaign aimed at a decisive defeat of Viet Minh forces. The second was to persuade them to give their commanders sufficient forces, preferably by raising the number of Vietnamese regular units, so that even a Salan might be enticed from behind his barbed wire to strike a massive blow at the enemy. During the following year both solutions were tried at once.

#### The Political Situation in Indochina--No Progress

If, by the end of 1952, the military outlook in Indochina was dreary, nothing in the political scene was any brighter. The government of Bao Dai had little more popular support in December than it had enjoyed in January and seemed to have few prospects for gaining such support in the foreseeable future. Its appeal for the average Vietnamese was not strengthened by the appointment, in April, of Letourneau as Minister Resident. M. Letourneau was known to regard the independence of Viet Nam as having already been completed and to

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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oppose any major revision of the 8 March Accords.<sup>5</sup> The French seemed determined to cling to their position in Indochina like a drowning man refusing to let go a sack of gold that is dragging him down.

On 2 June, in an effort to obtain a government with a broader base of popular and regional representation, the cabinet of Tran Van Huu was replaced by one under Nguyen Van Tam. Unfortunately, Tam was not only a French citizen but was well-known as an ardent French supporter, even more closely identified with French policies than Huu had been. The new Premier made many fine promises to the people, which were received with skepticism. He installed a Provisional National Council, ostensibly a sort of representative assembly, but the members were hand-picked by him. The Council never played any important role in Vietnamese affairs and, of course, never captured the imagination of the people. In 1952, at least, Tam was unable to do either the Bao Dai government or the French any good.<sup>7</sup>

The state of affairs in Viet Nam during this period is illustrated by a passage in the April MDAP report from the American Legation in Saigon.

Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Defense declared that Government has decided not to call up the fourth increment of conscripts in order that funds and present cadres could be used in accelerating the formation of two additional regular VN divisions to make a total of six by the end of 1952. He added that the draft is in any case not a primary source of manpower for the Army in view of the fact that there are

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State, "MDAP Monthly Report No. 19 (April 1952)," 23 May 52, G-3 091 Indo China, sec I-A, bk I, DRB AGO.

7. (S) Rpt, Gullion to State, "MDAP Monthly Report No. 21 (June 1952)," 31 Jul 52, same file; (S) Geneva Conf Background Paper, Indochina Chronology, pp. 70-71; Hammer, Struggle for Indochina, pp. 281-291.

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in French public opinion. The growth of Mendes-France's following weakened the coalition governments and was a definite indication that France's will to fight was at least beginning to deteriorate.

Early in 1952 the British began to regard the French internal situation as serious in its possible effects on Southeast Asia. In March the British Embassy in Washington sent an unofficial aide-memoire to the State-Department calling attention to recent statements of M. Letourneau. The Minister for the Associated States had said publicly, in reply to a question whether or not the French were prepared to enter into discussions with the Viet Minh, that France could not on principle reject any opportunity to end hostilities. He had also indicated that France would not reinforce its troops in Indochina. This had followed a statement by Foreign Minister Schuman that France "would not refuse an accord which would put an end to the conflict under conditions which would be honorable for France."<sup>56</sup> The British also felt there was reason to believe that French representatives had recently been in contact with the Viet Minh and, indeed, might be seeking Russian mediation.

The United States Government, however, was not alarmed. The Joint Intelligence Committee advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff that while there was a possibility of an eventual French withdrawal, the British estimate that it might be imminent was exaggerated. Reported French approaches to the Communists, they wrote, could not be confirmed. Furthermore, the factors disturbing the British had been considered in the preparation of a National Intelligence Estimate on 3 March in which United States intelligence experts had concluded that the French effort in Indochina would continue through mid-1952. This estimate was

<sup>56</sup>. (TS) Copy of Unofficial Aide Memoire on "Indochina" handed by member of Brit Emb to Asst SecState for Far Eastern Affairs, 15 Mar 52, CCS 092 Asia (6-25-48) sec 26; NY Times, 7 Jan 52, p. 4.

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projected through mid-1953 in another National Intelligence Estimate of 29 August.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the fact that these predictions were borne out it is difficult to escape the conclusion, on the basis of hindsight, that the United States Government was overestimating the strength of French determination. American officials, while not ignoring the warning signals that were flashing, seem to have comforted themselves with repeated assurances by the French Government that France would not give up the struggle. They realized of course, that if the situation in Indochina failed to improve, the French will and ability to continue resisting the Viet Minh would eventually weaken. They thus recognized that there was a limit to the time the French government would have to win the war before being faced with a collapse of the home front. But as late as June 1953 the belief was expressed, in a National Intelligence Estimate, that the French would maintain their current troop strength (and, by implication, their position) in Indochina through mid-1954, albeit "without enthusiasm."<sup>58</sup> And too seldom, during 1952, did United States officials, in planning for and supporting the Indochinese war, display the sense of urgency that would have been called for had the debacle of early 1954 been foreseen.

57. (TS) Encl B to SM-762-52, Memo, Lalor to JCS, "Indochina," 22 Mar 52, CCS 092 Asia (6-25-48) sec 26; (S) NIE 35/1, "Probable Developments in Indochina through mid-1952," 3 Mar 52; (S) NIE 35/2, "Probable Developments in Indochina through mid-1953," 29 Aug 52.

58. (S) NIE 91, "Probable Developments in Indochina through Mid-1954," 4 Jun 53.

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A major problem was the assessment of the probable consequences of a French defeat in Indochina. In June 1952 the Security Council had agreed that the loss of any Southeast Asian country would have critical consequences for the United States and would probably lead to the relatively swift realization of Communist domination over the whole area. But in November 1953 the Central Intelligence Agency would go no farther than to say: "A Viet Minh victory in Indochina would remove a significant military barrier to a Communist sweep through Southeast Asia, expose the remainder of that region to greatly increased external Communist pressures, and probably increase the capabilities of local Communists . . . ." However, the Deputy Director for Intelligence of the Joint Staff registered a dissenting view: "The establishment of Communist control over Indochina by military or other means would almost certainly result in the Communization of all of Southeast Asia . . . ."22

In Planning Board sessions Major General J. K. Gerhart, Special Assistant to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for National Security Council Affairs, argued convincingly in support of the Joint Staff estimates.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, when the Planning Board submitted its redraft to the appropriate agencies at the end of December 1953, the principal change in the new policy statement was increased emphasis on the dangers present in the Indochinese situation. The starting point was the same statement that had appeared in NSC 124/2: "Communist domination, by whatever means, of all Southeast Asia would seriously endanger in the short term, and critically endanger in the longer term, United States security interests." The redraft, thanks to General Gerhart's pleading, pointed out that the loss of Indochina would

22. (TS) SE-52, CIA Sp Est, "Probable Consequences in Non-Communist Asia of Certain Possible Developments in Indochina Before Mid-1954," 10 Nov 53, p. 1, JIG files.

23. (TS) Interv, Samuel A. Tucker with Lt Col J.W. Vogt, Office of the Spec Asst to JCS for NSC Affairs, 4 Jan 55, memo in JCS HS files. (TS) "An Account of the Events and Decisions Leading to the Loss of North Indochina," prepared for the record by the Office of the SpecAsst to JCS for NSC Affairs, 1st Draft, 25 Oct 54, pp. 26-27. (Hereinafter cited as Gerhart "Account.")

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